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A
L E T T E R
T O

Mr. S A N X A Y, *Edmund*

Surgeon, in Effex-Street. *K*

OCCASIONED BY
HIS VERY SINGULAR CONDUCT,
In the PROSECUTION of
Miss B U T T E R F I E L D,
W H O

Was tried at the Assizes at Croydon, Aug. 19, 1775,

For P O I S O N I N G the late
W I L L I A M S C A W E N, Esq.
O F

Woodcot-Lodge, in the County of Surry,

A N D
H O N O U R A B L Y A C Q U I T T E D.

— Duris genuit te cautibus horrens
Caucasus, Hyrcanæque admôrunt ubera tigres.

VIRG. Æn. iv. 366.

L O N D O N,
Printed for G. KEARSLY, in Fleet-street.

MDCCLXXV.

B h A

LETTER

MR. S. A. W.

Surgeon, in the Fleet.

THE SURGEON GENERAL'S OFFICE

AND BUTT STREET



HONORARY MEMBER

General Secretary, British Museum, London, W.C.

LONDON
Printed for G. Kearsley, in the Strand.

MCCCLXXV.

A
L E T T E R

T O

Mr. S A N X A Y.

S I R,

I Congratulate you on the success of your late enterprize in Surry. You appeared in the court of judicature at Croydon, on Saturday the 19th, with wonderful eclat. You displayed your consummate knowledge, candor, and humanity, in the most conspicuous
B light.

light. You seemed, on this occasion, to be infinitely pleased with yourself, your own importance, and the benevolent design, in which you were engaged. This diffused such an air of complacency over your countenance, that the spectators were every moment reminded of a certain illustrious personage, in a celebrated epic poem, who

“grinn’d a ghastly smile.”

Indeed, Sir, there is a striking resemblance in your respective characters. You were both of you delighted with the prospect of human misery.

But if you disapprove of this comparison, there is another character

racter in the same poem, which will suit you more exactly. I will immediately shew you, wherein the resemblance consists. For this purpose I will only beg leave to make a few observations on your conduct, relative to the prosecution of Miss B.

You observed, as you tell us, a young woman, attempting to poison her friend and benefactor. According to your account, dose after dose is administered. At such a crisis, a generous and good man would have taken the young woman aside; and, with a serious and emphatical tone of voice, would have expostulated with her in this manner: "Madam, Mr. Scawen is in a

" high salivation. You must have
 " given him some mercurial medi-
 " cine, or he must have taken it in
 " your absence. I must insist, that
 " you tell me what you know of
 " the matter. I shall be particular-
 " ly attentive to the symptoms of his
 " disorder; for his life is in dan-
 " ger."

A remonstrance of this nature, I
 will venture to say, would have in-
 timidated the most audacious vil-
 lain, much more a woman of Miss
 B.'s uncommon openness of heart,
 and mildness of disposition. It
 would have effectually prevented all
 her future attempts, if she had
 really meditated any attempts, upon
 the

the life of Mr. Scawen; or it would have led to a discovery of the real cause of his disorder.

But in what manner did you act upon this emergency?—Very differently from this open and generous mode of proceeding. You saw the plot; you observed the process. And, as you said *three times* on your examination, you “still kept your suspicions to yourself.” That is, you gave the supposed assassin an opportunity to perpetrate the atrocious crime, while you lay in ambush; that you might have the malignant satisfaction of seeing—a murder and an execution!—

This,

This, Sir, was truly *à la manière de Satan*.

A man of any tendernefs and humanity would have conducted himself with prudence and caution on fuch an occafion. He would have fufpected his own judgment, where circumftances were ambiguous : he would have thought it infinitely more humane and generous to prevent an offence, than to punifh the offender. He would have been fhocked at the thoughts of taking away the life of an innocent perfon, upon groundlefs fufpicions, or fallacious appearances.

But

But you, Sir, bade defiance to all tender feelings, and proved yourself a stranger to all the dictates of humanity. You swore, at all adventures, that " Mr. Scawen was poisoned ; and that the poison was administered by Miss B. with an intention to poison."

It was upon this testimony, and that of a servant, which was founded entirely upon your insinuations, that the grand jury thought themselves obliged to bring in the bill of indictment ; yet notwithstanding your attestation, they were three hours in deliberation. With what truth you took this solemn oath, I leave the public to determine.

It

It may perhaps be said in your defence, that you were not actuated by any malevolent design; but that you really believed Mr. Scawen was poisoned. If I admit of this plea, it will only, Sir, be paying a compliment to your heart, at the expence of your head. And after all, it is a despicable apology for your conduct. I do not suppose, that you are a conjurer; but I suppose, that your share of understanding might have been sufficient to shew you the necessity of a little care and circumspection, lest your hasty determination should bring an innocent person to the gallows.

If

If you did not know the effects of mercury in the human constitution, you might have easily consulted some of your more intelligent brethren; and they would have informed you, that the calomel applied to the ulcer in his arm, the quack medicines he had taken, and his MORBID habit of body, would have accounted for all the symptoms, which appeared in your patient.

If you had ever read Dr. Mead's Essay on Mineral Poisons, you might have recollected the following remarkable passage; and from thence inferred, that the salivation, which is said to have occasioned the death of

C

Mr.

Mr. Scawen, might have been owing to mercury, introduced into his constitution, in the manner I have suggested, and not to repeated infusions of corrosive sublimate in his liquid aliments and draughts.

“ Experience, says that learned
 “ author, has convinced us, that re-
 “ peated doses of crude mercury
 “ have, in some cases, even a confi-
 “ derable time after they have been
 “ taken, exerted their force, and
 “ thrown the body into unexpected
 “ disorders. I remember two acci-
 “ dents of this kind, and one of
 “ them proved fatal, in which, when
 “ small quantities had been given for
 “ several days together, a violent sa-
 “ livation

" livation ensued, more than two
 " months after the use of it had
 " been left off. And not long since,
 " I saw a young lady, who having
 " swallowed about six drachms
 " every morning, three successive
 " days, was salivated three weeks.
 " The flux then ceased; but returned
 " after six months, and held a
 " month; and once more came on,
 " in the same manner, two months
 " after. The breath was each time
 " strongly affected, as is usual in
 " mercurial spittings.—So surprising-
 " ly active is this mineral, even sim-
 " ple and uncompounded*."

* Mead's Medical Works, p. 102, edit. 1762.

The humane and judicious author of the *Synopsis Medicinæ*, having mentioned the symptoms of several mineral poisons, concludes with this advice to the physician, who is called in to inspect a dead body, in which there happen to be any suspicious appearances.

“ In giving judgement from the
 “ signs above mentioned, it behoves
 “ a physician to be very *prudent* in
 “ forming, and very *diffident* in pro-
 “ nouncing it. For all these, which
 “ are known to result from the cor-
 “ rosive quality of the poison, may
 “ possibly be the effect of a *sharp*
 “ and *inbred* humour, arising merely
 “ from

“ from a *vitiating habit of body*. More
 “ advisable therefore will it be, with-
 “ out convincing proof, to absolve
 “ the guilty, than by any means to
 “ *condemn the innocent*, which is entirely
 “ agreeable to all laws, both divine
 “ and human *.

After the death of Mr. Scawen,
 you should undoubtedly have or-
 dered the body to be opened. It
 would have been acting the part of
 a prudent surgeon, as well as a good
 man, to have examined the state of
 the stomach and bowels, before you
 had peremptorily asserted, that he
 was poisoned. But in this point you

* Allen's Synopsis, vol. ii. c. 16.

did

did not condescend to give the public the least satisfaction!

Now, Sir, to what principle must I attribute your conduct? To your ignorance, your self-sufficiency, your rashness, your obstinacy, or your malevolence of heart? This is a question, which, I protest, I cannot possibly determine: and therefore I leave you to take your choice.

If you are not utterly insensible to all sentiments of compassion and humanity, reflect for a moment on the mischief you have done. You have involved an innocent young woman in the deepest perplexity and distress.

At

At the age of fourteen, before she was capable of forming a proper judgement between virtue and vice, she was seduced from her parents, by one of her own sex; brought to Mr. Scawen; and, by a variety of artifices, prevailed on to continue in his house. Mr. Scawen spared no expence in perfecting her education; and shewed her so many instances of friendship and kindness, that she sincerely loved him, and gave him many unquestionable proofs of her gratitude, fidelity, and affection.

During his illness, which was almost without intermission, for the last six years of his life, she attended

ed him day and night, with the tenderest care and affiduity.

In the mean time, an unfeeling sycophant steps forward, and accuses her as the murderer of the man she had cherished and comforted. When she has only been a victim, she is tried for her life, as a criminal. And when she is honourably acquitted of the ignominious charge, she is sentenced to beggary for the remainder of her days, under the melancholy reflection of having *lost* a legacy (which she had dearly purchased) by your exciting a groundless suspicion in the breast of a man, for whom she had sacrificed her father, her mother, and herself.

If

If she had not providentially met with friends, who were clearly convinced of her innocence, and exerted themselves in her defence; if some of the most respectable gentlemen of the faculty had not exposed your absurd and inconclusive evidence, her amiable character would not have saved her; she must have lost her life, as well as her fortune, by your pernicious insinuations.

I have asserted, that this unfortunate young woman supported *an amiable character*; and I repeat the assertion. The late Mr. Scawen, in the
D earlier

earlier part of his life, had a connection with one Mrs. F. by whom he had a daughter, who is now living. This woman, some years before she died, was reduced to poverty. Mr. Scawen allowed her a very trifling annuity *. But Miss B. in consideration of the poor woman's distresses, made her an additional allowance of twenty pounds a year, out of her private purse.

When he altered his will in August, 1774, she prevailed upon him to leave his natural daughter 7000l. instead of 4000l. as he intended.

* Five pounds a year.

Besides

Besides this extraordinary act of benevolence, she made her, at different times, many liberal presents.

Her charity to the poor is well known in the neighbourhood of Woodcot Lodge.

I minutely attended to every circumstance, in the course of her trial; but I do not recollect, that any one of the witnesses, on the side of the prosecution, except yourself, and one or two, who had merely adopted your reports, attempted to advance a single syllable, which reflected on her conduct.

So far from this, it was asserted, by persons of unquestionable veracity, that she was always mentioned by Mr. Scawen with the highest commendation; and that she was deservedly beloved and respected.

In confirmation of what I have here advanced, I shall only observe, that as soon as the verdict was uttered, the hall resounded with acclamations and shouts of applause; the ladies, forgetting every prejudice they had conceived against her, burst into tears of joy, and there
was

was the most general expression of satisfaction ever heard on any occasion.

This, Sir, is the woman, whom you have involved in an expensive prosecution, whose expectations you have blasted, whose life you have brought into the most imminent danger, whose name you have attempted to stigmatize with indelible disgrace!

I cannot *altogether* blame the *weakness* of the late Mr. Scawen, for listening to your persuasions, for leaving his own house, and for cancel-
ing

ing the will, which he made in 1774, in favour of Miss B. He had a great opinion of your friendship, your judgement, and your prudence. But, alas! he was fatally deceived; and induced by your influence to take a step, which, if he could *now* be sensible of its consequences, would fill him with horror and indignation at the presumptuous temerity of his adviser.

Indeed Sir, I look upon you as something more than his adviser. You wrote the order for the dismissal of Miss B. from Woodcot Lodge,
and

and you (perhaps officiously) WROTE
HIS WILL.

You knew, that he had brought up this young woman from her infancy, under an absolute engagement, that he would leave her his estate. Upon this account she made no provision for contingencies ; but, as I have already observed, bestowed a great part of her private allowance in acts of charity. She had, by his encouragement, conducted herself as his daughter, or his wife. And yet you, barbarian, had not the modesty to intimate, that *possibly* you might

might be deceived ; and that *possibly* she might be innocent. In short, you had not the conscience to advise him to fulfil his engagements, PROVIDED, on the day of trial, she could acquit herself with honor.

It must be a strong *head*, Mr. S——y, which is not *affected* on such an occasion. You are said to have tried the strength of *one*, some years ago ; and now you have made a desperate experiment upon *another*.

What

What compensation can you possibly offer this injured woman, for the hardships she has already sustained? The least atonement you can make, is a public acknowledgment, that the poor dying man was induced to make a new will*, by your erroneous conceptions, and false suggestions; that she may be enabled to recover the fortune, which he had bequeathed her in the most deliberate manner, when

* Miss B.'s name is not once mentioned in *S—y's Will*. £. 10,000 is left to Mr. Scawen's natural daughter: the residue to J. Scawen, Esq.

he could form a proper judgement of her character and conduct ; when his mind was not *poisoned* by your malignant insinuations ; when he was left to follow the free and genuine inclinations of his heart.

As I have hardly ever heard of a case attended with more pitiable circumstances on one side, and a more infamous conduct on the other, I have been induced, without the least degree of prejudice, or knowledge of your person, to take up my pen in the cause of humanity : and if there should be

occa-

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occasion, I shall pursue the subject
with *additional* zeal.

I am, Sir,

Aug. 24, 1775.

*A Friend to the Unfortunate
and the Oppressed.*

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A P-

(2)

occasion, I shall pursue the subject
with additional notes.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient servant,

Aug. 25. 1844.

A Friend to the Unfortunate
and the Oppressed.

It is a pleasure to me to hear
of the success of your cause.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient servant,

Aug. 25. 1844.

A Friend to the Unfortunate
and the Oppressed.

A P P E N D I X.

AS this Letter may possibly fall into the hands of persons unacquainted with the circumstances of Miss B.'s prosecution, the following paper may serve to throw some farther light upon the subject. It was originally intended for her
defence

defence on her trial; but not being thought sufficiently circumstantial, it was laid aside; and she was persuaded to state her case more at large, in a long historical narrative, which was read in court,

My Lord, and Gentlemen of the Jury,

“ Though mankind in general
 “ are extremely apt to entertain violent prejudices against unfortunate
 “ persons in a situation like mine,
 “ and even to triumph over their
 “ distress, yet I flatter myself I shall
 “ be

" be heard in this court with im-
" partiality and candour.

" I sincerely respect the name and
" memory of the late Mr. William
" Scawen. I have for thirteen years
" past, ever since I knew him, be-
" haved towards him with the ut-
" most tenderness, fidelity, and ho-
" nour: the several wills which he
" voluntarily made in my favour,
" are a convincing proof, that he
" was perfectly satisfied with my
" conduct.

" In

“ In all his illnesses I faithfully
“ attended him day and night; and
“ endeavoured, by every little atten-
“ tion and assiduity in my power,
“ to alleviate his pain and disquiet-
“ udes, though often at the expence
“ of my own health.

“ I administered to him those me-
“ dicines, and those only, which I was
“ ordered to give him. I frequent-
“ ly entreated him to be cautious in
“ trusting to quackery, as his con-
“ stitution was exceedingly weak
“ and precarious: but he persisted
“ in his dangerous experiments. I
“ applied

“ applied the plasters and the pow-
“ der to his arm, as I was ordered ;
“ yet, alas ! I was a perfect stranger
“ to all the ingredients in these me-
“ dicines and these applications.

“ I have been charged with infus-
“ ing something of a destructive
“ nature into his medicines. Heaven
“ knows I neither harboured any one
“ sinister or unfriendly intention,
“ much less a design against his
“ life ; for the truth of this assertion,
“ I solemnly appeal to the all-
“ seeing providence of God.

F

“ I humbly

“ I humbly presume, that I have
“ merited the good opinion of every
“ one, who have seen me at Wood-
“ cot Lodge ; and I hope they will
“ give testimony in my favour with
“ impartiality and truth.

“ Mr. Scawen took a step, I con-
“ fess, before his death, which
“ amazed and wounded me to the
“ soul. But I am far from blaming
“ the poor dying man. I was re-
“ presented as his mortal enemy.
“ He was imposed upon by the most
“ injurious insinuations ; and I was
“ not once permitted to see him, or
“ to undeceive him.

“ The

“ The prosecution, which I have
“ suffered, in consequence of these
“ false suggestions, is extremely
“ cruel, is sufficient to affect every
“ feeling heart with compassion,
“ and even to alarm innocence it-
“ self. Humanity shudders at the
“ thoughts of an ignominious death,
“ though protected by an upright
“ conscience. In this awful crisis I
“ repose my confidence in a just and
“ good Providence, and in the equi-
“ ty of this respectable tribunal.”

T H E E N D.

"The protection which I have
 "suffered, in consequence of these
 "false allegations, is extremely
 "great, is sufficient to affect every
 "feeling heart with compassion,
 "and even to stain innocence in
 "the eyes of the community. I am the
 "victim of an ignominious death,
 "though protected by an upright
 "conscience. In this great trial I
 "repose my confidence in a just and
 "good Providence, and in the equi-
 "ty of this respectable tribunal."

THE END.

